



MONTANA SECRETARY OF STATE

Secy/Copy
LINDA McCULLOCH

EXHIBIT 1
DATE 02/15/2013
HB 428

HB 428: Allow mail ballot elections
House State Administration, RM 455
February 15, 2013 @ 8:00 a.m.
Secretary of State Linda McCulloch's Testimony

Good morning Madam Chair, members of the Committee. For the record, I'm Linda McCulloch, Montana Secretary of State.

Giving counties the option to hold a mail ballot election will enhance efficiencies in Montana's elections process and save taxpayers a considerable amount of money.

Montana voters are increasingly voting by mail. Over the past decade, the percentage of absentee voters has gone up by nearly 45% statewide – from about 15% in 2000 to almost 60% this past General Election. In fact, many counties have more absentee voters than polling place voters. In Yellowstone County, 80% of the total votes were cast by absentee ballot in the last General Election. More than 96% voted by absentee ballot in the Primary.

Voting by mail is not only popular, it is cost-effective and secure. It enhances voter protection by requiring eligibility and signature verifications – a process that makes it as secure and as transparent as polling place elections. Here's how: (1) Each voter must affirm their eligibility on the signature envelope; (2) Election officials, who are trained to handle mail ballots, verify each signature to ensure it matches the one on file with the voter's registration record; and (3) Every mail ballot is issued directly from the statewide voter file, which eliminates any possibility for a voter to vote more than one ballot in Montana.

These security measures are currently in place for absentee and mail ballots, and Montana's Election Administrators continue to do a great job ensuring the integrity of the process.

Mail ballot elections save taxpayer dollars by eliminating polling places, poll workers, and other administrative costs. If all counties choose to run federal elections by mail ballot, the total savings would be about \$2 million each biennium. That's based on county cost estimates, and includes total savings to run both a Primary and General statewide election.

Mail ballot elections secure the fairness and integrity of each election by giving voters more time to review and consider complex issues on the ballot before casting a vote – which means more ballots may be submitted complete. (It is not unusual for voters to vote for the top few races on a ballot and leave legislative races and initiatives blank.)

Mail ballots help to ensure that every race is voted, and that our government truly reflects the will of the people. When you couple million-dollar cost savings with voter protections, voting by mail makes sense for Montana. Remember: Voters are already moving in this direction.

Our online election service "My Voter Page" currently allows for Montana voters to check their registration status, and track the status of their absentee ballot (among other things). This high level of transparency works as assurance to the public of the integrity of the registration and voting process in Montana – and it will continue to be in place for mail ballot elections.

We currently have record absentee turnouts, and yet taxpayers must still pay for polling place locations and the costs associated with them. Let's eliminate those costs by putting the right technology and rules in place; and let's make it easier for every eligible Montanan to participate in every election.

I urge you to vote "yes" for HB 428. Thank you for your time this morning.